

## LANCASHIRE METHODIST DISTRICT: INTER FAITH ACTIVITIES      SPRING 2020

**Covid 19 and local responses** In the strange circumstances in which we find ourselves as a result of Covid-19, there are some important points to make regarding faith communities. The first is that faith can provide a degree of 'protection'; over the years many people in all traditions have found strength and solace in their faith. The second is that members of churches, mosques, temples etc are proving to be invaluable in supporting those who are living alone, shielded, or isolated in some way. Many of these would be classed as vulnerable, and have limited on-line connections. Thus, the fact that faith groups are giving telephone support to such vulnerable individuals is an important part of the national support effort. A rise in incidents of stress and anxiety is anticipated, and so the need for telephone support is not going to diminish.

If you feel able to offer your time as a telephone befriender, than go to:

<https://lancsvp.org.uk/>

Each local authority area has a designated "community hub" which is acting as a focus for efforts to provide support to those in need through this crisis. Whilst it now appears that there is sufficient capacity for delivering food, medicines etc, it is widely recognised that emotional and spiritual support and guidance is important. The Lancashire Forum of Faiths has provided a list of names of people from different faiths that will act as 'primary contacts', putting any enquirers in touch with someone in their area. Links to the hubs, where these names are, can be found here:

<https://ourlancashire.org.uk/community-hubs-contact-information/>

At county level, the Lancashire Resilience forum has a faith sub-group which has been meeting weekly via Skype. Initially a lot of attention was paid to funerals, and the arrangements for these. In the event, all services coped well, and the system has functioned well. Discussions are under way to hold an on-line webinar to explain how people from different faiths / religions approach and perceive dying, death itself, and ideas around eternity and eternal life. There is now discussion about re-opening of places of worship, but for the time being Methodist churches will NOT be re-opening.

**Interfaith forums** Although Lancashire is perceived as an area where interfaith dialogue is relatively well developed, at a local level there is a variation in how well structured this is. Preston Inter Faith forum is currently quite inactive, whilst Blackburn with Darwen's forum has ceased to meet physically. In the east of the county, Building Bridges Burnley is going through an encouraging transition under a new chair, while Building bridges Pendle is a good model of an effective forum.

The Lancashire Forum of Faiths operates at a more strategic level than local forums and has been engaging with regional health trusts to have the voice of faith communities heard during consultation exercises. Lobbying by members of this forum has been influential in improving the access to chaplaincy support in some hospitals. With the increased engagement of local authorities with faith groups, there is an opportunity to institute local and county-level faith covenants.

Events that would have been taking place shortly, such as **Visit My Mosque**, will not be taking place physically, but like so much else, are moving on-line. So, you can take a virtual mosque tour; go to: <https://www.visitmymosque.org/> to book a virtual tour

*Inter faith work is as important as ever. The murder of George Floyd has triggered protests around the world, and in the UK, these could lead to further unrest and tension between communities. Whilst the line between culture and faith is sometimes very fine, the voice of different faiths, emphasising our common, shared humanity, is vital at this time.*

If you are interested, and would like to know more, contact Peter Lumsden, District Inter Faith Dialogue Officer [pjlumsden58@gmail.com](mailto:pjlumsden58@gmail.com)

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